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ABSTRACT

This paper looks at multicultural counseling competencies from a national sample of Canadian Guidance and Counseling Association members. The study investigated two questions: (1) How do counselors rate their multicultural competencies in the dimensions of self-awareness, knowledge, skills, and multicultural counseling relationships? and (2) What demographic and professional practice factors are associated with higher and lower levels of multicultural counseling competencies? The results from the sample of Canadian counselors revealed that counselors with high multicultural counseling competencies had a significantly higher percentage of culturally diverse clients in their caseload and had taken more courses on multicultural counseling. No significant difference was found between groups according to age, level of education, years since graduation, and number of years of professional experience. The paper highlights the importance of professional development seminars on multicultural counseling, and on the experience of having a culturally diverse caseload of clients. (Contains 25 references.) (JDM)

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Predictive Characteristics of Multicultural Counselling Competence

Multicultural perspectives are one of the most influential forces in counselling psychology (Pedersen, 1990). The increasing diversity of North America's population has focused attention on culturally responsive approaches to counselling. Demographic changes challenge counsellors to consider the future consumers of professional services and how well their practices meet client needs (Arthur, 1998, Hall, 1997). It is recognized that cultural encapsulation may impact assessment and intervention practices in adverse ways (e.g., Dana, 1998; Pedersen, 1995; Sue & Sue, 1999; Sue et al., 1998). In response to concerns about what counsellors may unintentionally practice in oppressive ways, multicultural counselling competencies have been articulated in three domains: awareness, knowledge, and skills (Arredondo et al., 1996; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). Recent literature has expanded upon specific competencies in each of the three domains, and emphasized the importance of attending to organizational policies and practices to support multicultural counselling (Arredondo et al., 1996; Sue et al., 1998).

A rationale for developing multicultural counselling competencies is now well documented. However, studies that examine counsellors' multicultural competencies are only beginning to appear in the literature (e.g., Brown, Parham & Yonker, 1996; D'Andrea, Daniels, & Heck, 1991). The discrepancy between what is proposed as a foundation of competent practice and the self-reported competencies of counsellors is noteworthy. In general, research involving graduate students entering counselling professions suggests that practitioners do not feel well prepared for meeting the needs of their culturally diverse clientele. Higher levels of multicultural counselling competence have been attributed to direct exposure to people from particular cultural groups through training and casework (Allison, Crawford, Echemendia, Robinson, & Knepp, 1994; Allison, Echemendia, Crawford, & Robinson, 1996; Pope-Davis & Ottavi, 1994; Zayas, Torres, Malcolm, & DesRosiers, 1996). It remains a concern that what has been established as a set of guidelines for professional counselling practice may be far from what counsellor education programs are able to deliver. Even though the amount of multicultural content in counsellor education programs has increased in the 1990's (Reynolds, 1995), without deliberate efforts to access continuing education and supervision, professionals may lack the resources they need to update their multicultural counselling competencies. Further attention must be paid to the multicultural counselling competencies of graduate students who are entering counselling roles as well as the competencies of counsellors who are established in professional roles.

The research on multicultural counselling competencies to date is based almost exclusively on samples of American counsellors. The current study is the first investigation of multicultural counselling competencies with a national sample of Canadian counsellors. The following research questions were addressed:

1. How do counsellors rate their multicultural competencies on the dimensions of self-awareness, knowledge, skills, and the multicultural counselling relationship?
2. What demographic and professional practice factors are associated with higher and lower levels of multicultural counselling competencies?

The study was intended to compliment existing research on the self-reported multicultural competencies of counsellors and to examine the factors that appear to

influence the acquisition of higher levels of competence. The discussion outlines the procedures used in this study, major findings, and a discussion of the relevance of this investigation for future research and training.

Methodology

Participants and Procedure

A random sample was selected consisting of every third member of the Canadian Guidance and Counselling Association (CGCA) stratified by province. Questionnaires were mailed directly from the administrative offices of CGCA to ensure anonymity of participants. Replies from 205 members represent a response rate of 38%. Twenty-four questionnaires were not analyzed due to incomplete results, reducing the participation rate to 33%.

In the final sample of 181 participants there were 62 males and 119 females with a mean age of 46.5 years (SD= 8.9 years). Approximately half of the participants (55%) have been practicing as a counsellor for ten years or more.

Research Questionnaires

Two questionnaires in the study included a demographic questionnaire (adapted from the Multicultural Counselling Awareness Scale: Form B, Ponterotto, Sanchez, & Magids, 1991) and the Multicultural Counselling Inventory (MCI Sodowsky, Taffe, Gutkin, & Wise, 1994).

Multicultural Counselling Inventory. The MCI is a 40 item self-report inventory designed to assess the competencies of counsellors who work with minority or culturally diverse clients (Sodowsky et al., 1994). Items are rated on a 4-point Likert scale with a score of 1 indicating low multicultural counselling competence and a score of 4 indicating high multicultural counselling competence. Seven items are reversed scored to reduce the effects of a response set. Factor analysis produced a 4-factor model based upon responses from graduate student and university based counsellor samples. The Multicultural Counselling Awareness scale refers to proactive multicultural responsiveness, understanding, responsiveness and advocacy, i.e., *My life experiences with minority individuals are extensive*. The Multicultural Counselling Knowledge scale refers to culturally relevant case conceptualization and interventions, cultural information, and multicultural counselling research, i.e., *I am familiar with research findings about minority clients' experiences in counselling*. The Multicultural Counselling Skills scale refers to success in working with cultural minority clients, i.e., *I am able to recognize cultural mistakes and quickly recover*. The Multicultural Counselling Relationship scale incorporates counsellor and minority client interactions such as comfort level, stereotypes, and worldview, i.e., *I have difficulties communicating with clients who use a decision-making style that is different from mine*. The inventory has high face validity in the coverage of content pertaining to multicultural counselling competencies. Internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alphas) has been reported as ranging from .81 to .83 for Multicultural Counselling Skills, .80 to .83 for Multicultural Awareness, .65 to .67 for Multicultural Counselling Relationship, .79 to .80 for Multicultural Counselling Knowledge, and .86 to .88 for the full scale. Low to moderate correlations are evident among the factors, ranging from .16 to .41. A self-evaluation of multicultural counselling competencies can be obtained through the individual subscales as well as an overall evaluation through the full scale of the MCI (Sodowsky & Impara,

1996). Convergent validity of the MCI is supported by moderately high correlation of .68 between the full scales of the MCI and Multicultural Awareness-Knowledge-Skills Scale (D'Andrea et al., 1991). Low correlations between the MCI with racist attributions to African Americans, rigidity, and intolerance for ambiguity suggest that conceptually distinct constructs are measured by the MCI (Sodowsky & Impara, 1996). Subsequent research has confirmed that the four factors of the MCI are measuring distinct constructs, however the interscale correlations are reported to be higher overall than previous research with the exception of the Relationship scale (Pope-Davis & Nielson, 1996).

For this study, the Cronbach alpha values calculated for internal consistency were .79 for the overall MCI scale, .81 for the Skills scale, .76 for the Awareness scale, .74 for the Knowledge scale, and .66 for the Relationship scale. These reliability coefficients closely approximate the reliabilities reported by Sodowsky et al. (1994). A scale reliability analysis of the original Relationship scale indicated an alpha value of .55 that was primarily due to an item-scale loading of -19 for the only positive-scored item in the scale. Due to the poor loading of this item, it was omitted and the alpha value of the Relationship scale improved to .66.

Data Analysis

The correlations between the four scales of the MCI were determined. Next, the SPSS Quick Cluster routine was used to develop two categories of counsellors with high multicultural counselling competence and low multicultural counselling competence based on the four MCI scales. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was then conducted on the four scales to test for significant differences across the two groups of counsellors. Another MANOVA was performed using several independent demographic variables associated with high and low multicultural counselling competence. Finally, a Logistic Regression analysis was conducted to determine how well counsellor characteristics predicted multicultural counselling competence and to identify the strongest predictor characteristics.

Results

Although 84% of the participants have completed a graduate degree, only 34% of the participants completed one or more courses in multicultural counselling during their post-secondary program. This may be accounted for by the recent attention paid to multicultural counselling curriculum (Reynolds, 1995) as approximately half of the sample completed their post-secondary education prior to 1990. However, 64% of the participants have attended workshops or seminars that address multicultural counselling issues that were not part of their post-secondary program. It is noteworthy that 68% of the participants did not access supervision and 73% of the participants were not involved with other methods of case consultation regarding their culturally diverse clients.

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations for the overall MCI scale and the Skills, Awareness, Knowledge, and Relationship scale scores. Correlations among the MCI scales in Table 2 show that the Skills scale was positively and highly related to the overall MCI scale. The Skills and Knowledge scales were moderately, significantly, and positively related. Awareness was also significantly and positively related to Skills and Knowledge although the correlation is not as strong as the relationship between Skills and Knowledge. These results approximate the MCI subscale correlations found during instrument development (Sodowsky et al., 1994) and suggest that the scales are

measuring related but different constructs (Ottavi, Pope-Davis, & Dings, 1994). The Relationship scale was not significantly related to the overall MCI scale and was negatively related to other scales. This is counter-intuitive and suggests that perhaps the relationship scale is measuring a factor other than multicultural counselling competency, or a unique dimension of multicultural counselling competency.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for MCI Scales

	Range	M	SD
MCI	39 – 156	116.2	10.1
Skills	11 – 44	38.3	4.1
Awareness	10 – 40	27.0	5.1
Knowledge	11 – 44	35.2	4.2
Relationship	7 – 28	15.7	3.4

Table 2

Correlations Among MCI Scales

	MCI	Skills	Awareness	Knowledge
Skills	.69 ***			
Awareness	.69 ***	.23 **		
Knowledge	.78 ***	.57 ***	.33 ***	
Relationship	.14	-.20 **	-.15 *	-.09

Note: * $p<.05$ ** $p<.01$ *** $p<.001$

Participants were classified according to multicultural counselling competence and high multicultural counselling competence, determined by the similarity of their scores on the four scales of the MCI. Analysis of Variance F-values of the skills, knowledge, awareness, and relationship mean scores indicated there were significant differences across the two groups, $F(4,172)=81.9, p<.001$. Univariate F-values in Table 3 show that counsellors with high multicultural counselling competence have significantly higher

mean scores on the Skills, Awareness and Knowledge scales but a significantly lower mean score on the Relationship scale, with the largest difference between groups evident in multicultural Awareness, $F(1, 176)=154.7$, $p<.001$.

Table 3

Counsellor High and Low Multicultural Counselling Competence

Value	High X	High SD	Low X	Low SD	F-
Competence Scales	(N=87)		(N=90)		
Skills	40.5	2.7	36.2	4.2	64.0 ***
Awareness	30.6	3.4	23.6	4.0	154.7 ***
Knowledge	37.5	3.4	33.0	3.6	73.2 ***
Relationship	14.7	3.0	16.7	3.4	17.6 ***
Counsellor Characteristics	(N=78)		(N=78)		
Age	46.2	8.3	47.2	9.5	.5
Level of education	3.0	0.7	2.9	0.6	.9
Years since graduation	11.7	8.0	12.0	9.0	.0
Professional experience	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	.3
Multicultural coursework	1.5	1.1	1.0	0.9	8.9**
Multicultural clients	30.6	29.4	17.7	22.4	9.5**

Note: *p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

A Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was conducted using age, level of education, professional experience, multicultural casework, and caseload variables associated with the multicultural counselling competency categories. The MANOVA revealed an overall significant difference in these variables across groups, $F(6,149)=2.7$,

$p<.05$). An examination of the univariate F-values revealed that counsellors with higher multicultural counselling competence had a significantly higher percentage caseload of culturally diverse clients ($F(1,155)=9.5, p<.01$) and had taken significantly more course work on multicultural counselling ($F(1,155)=8.9, p<.01$). There were no significant differences between the groups according to age, level of education, years since graduation, and number of years of professional experience.

Next, a Backward Stepwise Logistic Regression was conducted to determine how well counsellors' characteristics predict multicultural counselling competency and to also identify which counsellor characteristics were the strongest predictors. The following independent variables were entered into the Regression analysis: age, gender, attendance of multicultural seminars, number of multicultural courses completed, caseload of minority clients, ethnicity, the year of graduation from post-secondary training, the number of years practicing as a counsellor, supervision, consultation. Using these variables, the Regression analysis was able to correctly classify 66% of counsellors with high multicultural counselling competence and 70% of the counsellors with low multicultural counselling competence (Chi-square=30.8,$p<.01$), correctly classifying 68% of all counsellors. Table 4 presents the values for the independent variables that were the strongest predictors of counsellors' multicultural counselling competencies. The strongest predictors were caseload of culturally diverse clients and completion of professional seminars on multicultural counselling. With the level of significance relaxed, case consultation also appeared as a strong predictor of counsellors' multicultural counselling competence.

Table 4

Characteristics Predicting Multicultural Counselling Competence

	B	SE	R	B	Sig. Wald
Multicultural training					
Seminars	.91	.38	.14	5.6	.018
Caseload	.02	.01	.14	5.8	.016
Consultation	.77	.43	.07	3.1	.077

Discussion

The strong support for multicultural counselling competencies has not been matched by research evaluating how they are developed. A key question in counsellor education is how can we create the types of experiences for counsellors that will support

the development of multicultural counselling competencies? Course work in counsellor education programs can provide important background information in the knowledge domain and encourage students to engage in a process of self-reflection. Experiential learning has been recommended to help students develop self-awareness and to engage in personal reflection about cultural influences on the counselling process (Achenbach & Arthur, 2000). Counsellor education programs also need to expose students to members of culturally diverse groups and provide opportunities for skill development through practicum placements and cross-cultural supervision (Arthur, 1998). Given the wide variations in curriculum addressing multicultural counselling (D'Andrea & Daniels, 1991) it is timely to review counsellor education programs and to evaluate how "best practices" in curriculum translates to preparing graduates for working with culturally diverse populations.

Opportunities for professional development are crucial for counsellors to examine issues related to cultural encapsulation, gain knowledge and information about culturally diverse populations, and to consult about emerging value conflicts in counselling relationships. Beyond individual efforts, the leadership of counselling agency administrators and professional associations are needed to promote individual and organizational development (Sue et al., 1998). This includes developing resources and practices that support access to consultation and supervision. Although it appears that counsellors may resolve cultural issues through "trial and error" methods, practicing without adequate supervision and consultation may leave clients at risk for harmful assessments and interventions. Although there may be mitigating personal or systemic barriers that impact opportunities for developing multicultural counselling competencies, there are ethical considerations that cannot be discounted (e.g., Canadian Psychological Association, 1996; Pedersen, 1995). Beyond client-counsellor interactions, recent developments in counsellor supervision (e.g., Brown & Landrum-Brown, 1995) suggest that cultural influences should be considered as integral aspects of all counselling relationships.

This study has identified some of the variables that are associated with high and low levels of multicultural counselling competencies. In particular, the study has highlighted the importance of professional development seminars on multicultural counselling, experience with a caseload comprised of culturally diverse clients, and there is suggestive evidence of the importance of consultation. However, there are limitations to the study that require acknowledgment. First, the sample size may be prohibitive for generalizing results. Second, this study has relied on the self-reports of counsellors regarding their ratings of multicultural counselling competencies. Third, there is speculation that counsellors who have been trained in multicultural counselling may appreciate the diversity found in their caseload and be more realistic about the limitations of their expertise. It may be that the responses of participants actually under or over-represent their actual competency levels. Despite these limitations, this study has identified key factors in the practice of counsellors that contribute to higher or lower levels of multicultural competencies. Beyond the recommended multicultural counselling competencies, additional studies are needed to demonstrate the barriers and opportunities for counsellors to integrate multicultural counselling competencies into effective practice with clients.

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